

SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR IDENTIFYING DESIRABLE SUBSCRIBERS

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CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

[0002] This application relates to Attorney Docket No. 36968-265386 (BS01341), filed simultaneously, entitled "System and Method for Identifying Desirable Subscribers," which is incorporated herein by reference. This application also relates to U.S. Application Serial No. 09/496825, filed February 1, 2000, which is incorporated herein by reference.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0003] The present invention generally relates to the measurement of content-access patterns. The present invention more particularly relates to utilizing content-access patterns and other subscriber-specific information to identify desirable subscribers.

BACKGROUND

[0004] Content providers derive revenue directly or indirectly from subscribers. Therefore, content providers, including, for example, advertisers, content creators, and content distributors strive to identify desirable subscribers. A subscriber may be desirable for any number of

reasons. For example, a subscriber may be desirable due to past spending or viewing patterns, which indicate a propensity for exhibiting a related behavior that the content provider considers desirable. For example, the subscriber may also be desirable due to the subscriber's demographic profile, including the subscriber's age, income, or other attribute. A desirable subscriber is a subscriber who is likely to make a decision to purchase a product or service or to view a provider's content.

[0005] Content providers utilize various methods to identify desirable subscribers, such as monitoring the subscriber's content-access patterns and performing surveys to determine a subscriber's demographic profile. For example, a television-programming provider may implement a program of voluntary logging of television viewing by a viewer, followed by transmission and human processing to analyze the information contained in the log. In addition, a provider may utilize telephone, mail, or other types of surveys to inquire from random or selected viewers about the viewers' viewing habits and request their recollections regarding their viewing patterns. A provider may also utilize automated monitoring systems that attempt to intercept television channel choices and changes, record these events, and provide the recording to a clearinghouse or other facility for further processing.

[0006] The provider may enlist a ratings company to perform the monitoring and processing. For example, Nielsen Media Research (Nielsen Media Research, Inc., New York, New York.), Arbitron (Arbitron Inc., New York, New York.), and MeasureCast (MeasureCast, Inc., Portland, Oregon.) provide third-party monitoring and processing capability for television, radio, and Internet content.

[0007] The Nielsen Media Research (Nielsen) Ratings are perhaps the best known of the various third-party ratings services. Nielsen utilizes a variety of conventional sampling methods

to determine the number of viewers watching a particular show. For example, in five thousand homes, Nielsen installs a People Meter. The People Meter records viewing patterns from television sets, cable television set-top boxes, videocassette recorders, satellite television set-top boxes, and other sources of television programming. The People Meter records what content the particular device is providing on an ongoing basis and periodically transmits this information to servers within a Nielsen facility. Nielsen combines the data uploaded from the People Meter with media content data to determine what programming and advertising a device displayed. Nielsen uses the combined data to provide a rating for each program and advertisement. In conjunction with the People Meter, Nielsen also utilizes viewer diaries and surveys to gather information from a broader spectrum of television viewers and to confirm the results generated by the People Meter.

[0008] Arbitron Inc. (Arbitron) is well known for providing radio broadcast ratings. Arbitron compiles ratings by utilizing surveys. Arbitron also provides television ratings based on various sampling techniques. In cooperation with Nielsen, Arbitron has developed a Portable People Meter to measure television ratings. The Portable People Meter is a pager-sized device, worn by a participant in a survey. The Portable People Meter records viewing by recording sounds encoded into each broadcast, which identify the program or advertisement. The survey participant periodically plugs the Portable People Meter into a recharger, which also includes a communicator that uploads the data in the Portable People Meter into a remote Arbitron server. The Portable People Meter may be a more accurate method of television ratings than a set-top box, such as the set-top box used by Nielsen. The Portable People Meter offers the advantage of capturing viewing outside of the home and of recognizing when the viewer is not within audible

range of a television, and therefore, less likely to be viewing a particular program or advertisement.

[0009] As the use of the Internet increases, the distribution of programming via Internet channels becomes more important. MeasureCast, Inc. (MeasureCast) provides a ratings system for Internet media streaming. MeasureCast records the number of streams requested from a streaming server and provides reports to programming providers and advertisers detailing the popularity of particular streams. As is the case in traditional broadcast media, the more popular the stream, the higher the advertising rate a broadcaster is able to charge.

[0010] Nielsen, Arbitron, and MeasureCast provide direct methods of measuring the popularity of a program. Various indirect methods are also used to determine the popularity of programming and the effectiveness of advertising. For example, advertising effectiveness is often measured in terms of viewer attitudes and subsequent viewer actions, such as purchases, inquiries, behavior changes, and other actions. Method of obtaining these indirect measures include: focus group tests, post-advertising surveys questioning whether an advertisement was viewed, remembered and possible impact, and measures of product purchases or other indirect results that may indicate whether or not an advertising campaign has been successful.

[0011] Conventional methods for identifying desirable subscribers are inefficient and ineffective in identifying specific subscribers or small groups of subscribers to which a content provider can direct resources. For example, conventional systems, such as the Nielsen and Arbitron meters, rely on small samples, which may not be representative of the target market for a particular content provider. Conventional methods for identifying desirable subscribers also lack an efficient means for matching the demographics, content-access patterns, spending habits, and other attributes with specific subscribers on a large-scale basis. Therefore, subscribers are

targeted as generalized groups rather than accurately targeted as individuals or as members of small, homogenous groups.

[0012] Also, surveys are expensive and highly dependent on identifying individuals that may be of interest to the particular content provider sponsoring the survey. Post-advertising results measurements suffer from questions of causality and external influences. Focus groups allow reasonably efficient low-volume viewer analysis, but statistical analysis requires an adequate number of participants and tightly controlled tests, a combination that may be difficult to achieve.

[0013] Also, because comprehensive information about a subscriber is unavailable, it may be difficult or impossible in conventional systems to determine a causal link between a particular viewing pattern or attribute and an action. A subscriber may show an interest in a category, but the interest may not lead to an action. The content provider has no direct way of determining the causal link. For example, a subscriber may view many automobile programs or advertisements but never purchase a new automobile. A different subscriber may purchase new automobiles regularly yet never watch a program or advertisement devoted to automobiles. Establishing the causal link is of great value to the content provider.

SUMMARY

[0014] The present invention provides systems and methods for utilizing information relating to a subscriber to identify the subscriber as desirable. An embodiment of the present invention as a computerized system includes a content-access information database, a subscriber attribute database, and a subscriber information database. The computerized system also includes a merge processor to merge information from the content access information and subscriber

attribute databases to create data in the subscriber information database. The computerized system also includes a data analyzer electronically connected to the subscriber information database. The analyzer allows a content provider to access subscriber information to determine patterns of content access and to correlate these patterns with additional subscriber information.

[0015] In embodiments of the present invention, the subscriber attribute database includes information associated with a subscriber that allows content providers to identify the subscriber as a desirable subscriber. For example, in one embodiment of the present invention, the subscriber attribute database includes a purchase history for the subscriber, such as a credit card database. The purchase history may include purchases of the content provider's products and/or services and may include purchases of products and/or services, which are complementary to or competitive with the content provider's products and/or services. In another embodiment, the subscriber attribute database includes a property-ownership database. In yet another embodiment, the subscriber attribute database includes a survey result or questionnaire response database.

[0016] The data analyzer in an embodiment of the present invention includes a tool used by content providers to identify desirable subscribers. The data analyzer may include a report creator, a multidimensional database, and/or a data-mining application. A data-mining application allows a user to derive new information or discover new patterns in datasets.

[0017] In an embodiment of the present invention, the content provider or other user wishing to identify desirable subscribers receives viewing information associated with a subscriber, receives subscriber attributes, merges the received information into a single dataset, and then analyzes the dataset to identify the subscribers. The subscriber may be desirable as a consumer or for some other purpose of value to the provider performing analysis of the data.

[0018] The viewing information may include programming and/or advertising data. The viewing information may also identify the time-of-day, duration, and/or other distinguishing characteristic of the subscriber's viewing patterns.

[0019] An embodiment of the present invention includes a computer-readable medium on which is encoded computer program code for utilizing information relating to a subscriber in order to identify the subscriber as a desirable subscriber.

[0020] An embodiment of the present invention offers numerous advantages over conventional systems and methods for identifying desirable subscribers. In an embodiment of the present invention, an analyst uses subscriber-specific information to identify desirable subscribers rather than data obtained from small samples and then extrapolated to predict the behavior of similar subscribers. By identifying groups of desirable subscribers, an analyst is able to bring efficiency to the process of targeting consumers or other subscribers. The process of targeting subscribers in an embodiment of the present invention is more efficient than conventional approaches because rather than targeting large groups of subscribers in an attempt to deliver the content to the subset who may be desirable, the content is either delivered to the same number of desirable subscribers for less cost or to a larger number of desirable subscribers for the same cost. Less desirable subscribers do not receive the content, and consequently content providers do not pay the cost for delivering content to the less desirable subscribers.

[0021] An embodiment of the present invention offers further advantages to content providers and advertisers. In an embodiment of the present invention, a content provider, advertiser, provider of goods and/or services, or other user has the ability to compare subscriber purchases of complementary and/or competitive products. The ability to perform the comparison helps the provider determine the relative strengths and/or weaknesses of the provider's offering.

[0022] Also, in an embodiment of the present invention, the user gains the ability to correlate actions, such as purchases, with content viewed by a specific subscriber. For example, if a subscriber purchases a car within two days of viewing a targeted advertising, the provider may be able to make certain conclusions about the effectiveness of the advertisement.

[0023] Further details and advantages of the present invention are set forth below.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

[0024] These and other features, aspects, and advantages of the present invention are better understood when the following Detailed Description is read with reference to the accompanying drawings, wherein:

Figure 1 is a diagram of an exemplary embodiment and an exemplary environment for operation of an embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 2 is a flowchart illustrating a process implemented to merge various data sources in an embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 3A is a table illustrating various sources of programming and advertising content available to a subscriber during a period of time in an embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 3B illustrates content displayed on a subscriber's television during a period of time in an embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 4 is a flowchart illustrating the process of merging the data shown in Figure 3A to create the merged data shown in Figure 3B in an embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 5 is a table illustrating the programming viewed by the subscriber during the period shown in Figures 3A, 3B, and 4 in an embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 6 is a flowchart illustrating the process for identifying a desirable subscriber in an embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 7A is a table illustrating a subscriber information database in an embodiment of the present invention.

Figures 7B and 7C are tables illustrating probability calculations performed on the data in the table in Figure 7A in an embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0025] Embodiments of the present invention provide systems and methods for utilizing information relating to a subscriber to identify the subscriber as desirable. In an embodiment of the present invention, a content-access information database includes viewing information for a subscriber. A subscriber attribute database includes additional data about the subscriber. A merge processor combines this information, using a key, such as the subscriber's social security number, to create a subscriber information database. A data analyzer, such as a data-mining application, provides tools for searching the subscriber database or to identify desirable subscribers. The data analyzer in an embodiment of the current invention provides a tool that allows a content provider to correlate content-access information, such as television viewing habits, and other subscriber information to identify desirable subscribers.

[0026] Figure 1 is a block diagram illustrating an exemplary environment for an embodiment of the present invention. In the embodiment shown, a cable operator's head-end facility 102 includes a merge processor 104, which is in communication with a plurality of databases. These databases include a local-content database 106, a subscriber-action database 112, and a national-

a content database 114. The merge processor 104 is programmed to receive and merge data from the two databases 112, 114.

[0027] The local-content database 106 includes information from the advertising 108 and programming 110 databases. The advertising database 108 includes information related to local advertising produced and/or provided by the cable operator or other local source. Likewise, the programming database 110 includes information related to locally produced and/or provided programming. The advertising database 108 includes attributes of advertisements, such as the advertiser, producer, brand, product type, length of the content, and other descriptive information. The programming database 110 includes similar information related to programming, including the producer, type of programming, length, rating, and other descriptive information. The local-content 106, programming 108, and advertising 110 databases include a date-time identifier, which indicates when a program or advertisement has been provided. The date-time indicator provides a key value for merging various databases with one another.

[0028] In the embodiment of the present invention shown in Figure 1, the cable operator head-end 102 also includes a national-content database 114. The national-content database 114 includes information from an advertising database 116 and a programming database 118. The information contained in each of these respective databases is similar to that contained in the local advertising 108 and programming 110 databases. However, the content is produced for a national audience and subsequently provided to the cable operator. The national-content 114, programming 118, and advertising 116 databases also include a date-time identifier.

[0029] The cable operator head-end 102 also includes a subscriber-action database 112. The subscriber-action database 112 includes the actions taken by subscribers while viewing television sets. For example, in the embodiment shown in Figure 1, subscriber-action database 112 is in

communication with cable network 120. A processor (not shown) in cable network 120 receives any subscriber actions transmitted via cable network 120 and inserts the actions as records in subscriber-action database 112. Also in communication with cable network 120 is a set-top box 124, which is installed in a subscriber's home 122. Also located in subscriber's home 122 is a television (TV) 126. As a subscriber 123 makes viewing choices on TV 126 via set-top box 124, these choices or actions are transmitted via a processor (not shown) in cable network 120 to the subscriber-action database 112.

[0030] The subscriber-action database may include a clickstream database. A clickstream database is common in Internet monitoring applications. Each time a web-browser user clicks on a link in a web page, a record of that click is stored in a conventional clickstream database. A database that includes similar information for television viewers is disclosed in a patent application filed on May 25, 2000 by Edward R. Grauch, et. al., Serial No. 09/496,92, entitled "Method and System for Tracking Network Use," which is hereby incorporated by reference. In the database described, each action taken by a television subscriber 123, such as "channel up" and "channel down" are stored in a database with a date-time stamp to allow tracking of the television subscriber's actions.

[0031] In the embodiment shown in Figure 1, a merge processor 104 receives information from the local-content 106, national-content 114, and subscriber-action 112 databases and merges the data based on date-time attributes of the data. For example, a detail record in the subscriber-action database 112 indicates that a subscriber's set-top box 124 was tuned to channel 12, a National Broadcasting Company (NBC) affiliate. A record in the national-content database 114 indicates that at the same point in time, NBC was broadcasting a Professional Golf Association (PGA) tournament. A record in the local-content database 106 further indicates that

the cable provider preempted the PGA tournament to broadcast an infomercial for a real estate investment strategy video. The merge processor 104 receives information from each of these sources and determines that at the point in time of interest, the subscriber 123 was watching the infomercial. The merge processor stores the resultant data in the subscriber content-choice database 128. In one embodiment of the present invention, the merge processor collects information from the various databases rather than receiving it. For example, a program on the merge processor 104 includes instructions for connecting to the various databases and extracting data from each one.

[0032] In another embodiment of the present invention, subscriber content-choice database 128 includes merged information for a period of time and for a plurality of subscribers. For example, a program provider may wish to track the popularity of a program for several thousand subscribers for an entire month. Another provider may be interested in analyzing the seasonal differences in subscriber viewing behaviors.

[0033] Although in the embodiment shown in Figure 1, the cable network is a two-way digital cable network, various other network types may also be utilized. For example, in one embodiment, subscriber's home 122 receives cable service via a digital one-way cable system. In such a system, set-top box 124 may communicate subscriber actions to subscriber-action database through a modem and telephone connection periodically. In another embodiment, subscriber 123 receives content through a digital subscriber line (DSL) from a DSL provider. In a DSL system, the set-top box 124 is able to perform two-way communications and can therefore transmit subscriber actions to subscriber-action database 112 directly.

[0034] Although in the embodiment shown, the various databases and merge processor 104 are located in the head-end facility 102, in other embodiments, the databases and merge

processor 104 exist as software within the set-top box 124 or as software residing within a television network's facility (not shown). The data may be captured and analyzed by programming and advertising producers or distributors or may be utilized within a subscriber's set-top box 124 to provide advanced services tailored to the subscriber 123.

[0035] The cable operator head-end facility 102 also includes a subscriber attribute database 130. The subscriber attribute database 130 includes information about the subscriber, including, for example, demographic information, a purchase history, and questionnaire responses. The demographic information may include the profession of the subscriber, a property ownership history of the subscriber, the age, income, marital status, and other information useful in analyzing a subscriber's behavior. The data in the subscriber attribute database 130 may exist at various levels. For example, in one embodiment of the present invention, the subscriber attribute database includes a purchase history of products, which are complementary or competitive to those of provider's who analyze the data.

[0036] The cable operator head-end facility 102 also includes a subscriber information database 132. The merge processor 104 merges information from the subscriber content choice 128 and subscriber attribute database 130 to create records in the subscriber information database 132. The records in the databases are merged using a key attribute of a subscriber, such as the subscriber's social security number.

[0037] An analyzer 134 provides tools to a provider or other user to identify desirable subscribers in the subscriber information database 132. The analyzer 134 may include various types of tools, including tools that search the subscriber information database 132 automatically and tools that allow the user to perform manual searches. For example, the analyzer 134 may include a simple report creator that allows the user to search the subscriber information database,

perform filtering and sorting, and print the results. For example, in the embodiment shown, the analyzer 134 automatically creates reports 136. The reports include summary and detailed information correlating subscriber content-access history and other attributes, such as a purchase history.

[0038] The analyzer 134 may include more complex tools such as an online analytical process application or multidimensional database. In one embodiment, analyzer 134 includes a data-mining application. A data-mining application allows a user to derive new information or discover new patterns in existing datasets. In an embodiment of the present invention, analyzer 134 includes a combination of these tools so that a provider can make the best use of the data.

[0039] For example, in an embodiment of the present invention, a data-mining application on the analyzer 134 produces reports 136, illustrating influences and affinities within the subscriber information database 132. Influences indicate cause-and-effect relationships between various data elements. Affinities describe groupings of data or data that occur under the same circumstances. For example, a subscriber who accesses certain content may also be likely to purchase a certain brand of soft drink. These content and the soft drink brand share an affinity or inherent similarity. The data-mining application provides additional reports 136, which detail anomalies in the data, such as a specific demographic group purchasing goods generally aimed at a completely different demographic group. For example, generally television viewers in demographic group 1 tend to view nature shows almost exclusively. However, based on a data-mining report, a majority these same television viewers view Show A, which is aimed a science fiction show. Using this information, advertisers now know to advertise during both nature shows and during Show A.

[0040] In the embodiment shown, the various databases and merge processor 104 are located in the head-end facility 102. In other embodiments, the databases and merge processor 104 exist as software within the set-top box 124 or as software residing within a television network's facility (not shown). The data may be captured and analyzed by programming and advertising producers or distributors or may be utilized within a subscriber's set-top box 124 to provide advanced services tailored to the subscriber.

[0041] Figure 2 is a flowchart illustrating the general process the merge processor (104) shown in Figure 1 implements to categorize and merge data from the various databases in an embodiment of the present invention. Figures 3-7 illustrate the process in greater detail.

[0042] Referring to Figure 2, merge processor (104) receives subscriber action data from the subscriber-action database (112) 202. Subscriber action data may include data indicating that the subscriber 123 viewed an alternate data source for a period of time. For example, the subscriber 123 may view video from a VCR or DVD or other video source for a period of time. This video source supersedes both national and local-content in the subscriber content-choice database 128.

[0043] The merge processor (104) also receives data from the national-content database (114) 204. National-content data includes data describing media, such as programming and media, supplied by national providers. The merge processor (104) next assigns a category or genre to the national-content data 206. A genre is a specific type of category used in relation to artistic compositions, and genre and category are used interchangeably herein. The merge processor (104) assigns categories to content based on attributes of the content. For example, a program has a name and a creation date. The name of the program is "Wake Forest University vs. Duke University Basketball Game," and a creation date equal to the current date. The merge processor (104) uses logic in a computer program to determine that the program should be

categorized as a “Live Sporting Event.” The merge processor (104) may assign multiple categories to a single program, such as “Basketball,” “Sports,” “College-Related Programming,” or some other broad descriptive term.

[0044] The merge processor also receives data from the local-content database (106) 208. The merge processor (104) then assigns a category to the local-content data 210 in a manner similar to the process of assigning a category to national-content data.

[0045] Once the merge processor has assigned a category to data in each of the content databases, the merge processor merges the categorized content data, national and local, with data from the subscriber-action database (112) 212 and creates records with the combined data in the subscriber content-choice database (128) 214. Since the content data was categorized prior to the merge process, the data in the subscriber content-choice database 214 retains the assigned categories. Therefore, data in the subscriber content-choice database 214 can be sorted, filtered, reported, and used for various other processes, which utilize groupings of the data.

[0046] The subscriber content-choice database 128 may be implemented in various ways. For example, the database 128 may simply be a number of tables in a relational database. To simplify the process of querying the data, the database may include an online analytical processing tool, such as a multidimensional database.

[0047] Figure 3A illustrates the sources of programming and advertising content available to the subscriber 123 while the set-top box 124 is tuned to a single channel. Figure 3B illustrates the content displayed on the TV. Figure 4 is a flowchart illustrating the process of merging the various content types shown in Figure 3A to determine the content displayed on a particular channel.

[0048] Figure 3A includes a Content Type column 302. The various content types displayed in the Content Type column 302 are shown in relation to Time 304. Time 304 in Figure 3A is divided into hour 306 and quarter-hour 308 segments. Figure 3A represents a simplistic scenario in which set-top box 124 is tuned to a single channel. Therefore, the Content Type 302 column includes five types of content: National Programming 310, National Advertising 312, Local Programming 314, Local Advertising 316, and Other Video Source 318. In order to present a simplified view of the available content types during the period, several content types overlap, when in reality, they would actually occur in series. For example, National Programming 310 and National Advertising 312 do not occur at the same time, but it is likely that programming and advertising both would be broadcast for at least some period of time during the fifteen minute periods of overlap shown in Figure 3A. For example, during a television program provided by a broadcast network, a two or three-minute break occurs approximately every fifteen minutes. Therefore, a fifteen-minute period in which a three-minute break occurs will include twelve minutes of programming and three minutes of advertising.

[0049] As shown in Figure 3A, multiple types of content may be provided during any period of time. The fact that the content is provided does not indicate that it is available on the set-top box (124) or that the subscriber 123 is viewing the content. For example, in the embodiment shown, the cable provider provided National Programming 310 continuously throughout the period. The provider provided National Advertising 312 approximately every 15 minutes during the same period. Also, the cable provider provided Local Programming 314 from 1:00 until 2:30, and Local Advertising 316 approximately every 15 minutes during that period. The cable provider subsequently provided Local Advertising 316 during the period beginning at 5:15. Also

during the period shown in Figure 3A, the subscriber 123 viewed input from the Other Video Source 318, e.g., VCR or DVD, from 2:30 until 4:15.

[0050] Figure 4 illustrates the process for determining which programming is displayed on the subscriber's television during any specific period of time and inserting that data into the subscriber content-choice database 128 if the subscriber 123 is viewing that channel. Although various sources of content, such as a cable TV channel or a DVD movie, may be available to the subscriber (123) during any period of time, the subscriber (123) generally views only one source of programming or advertising at any one time. In addition, a content provider, such as a cable operator, makes determinations regarding which content will be available via a communications channel.

[0051] In an embodiment of the present invention, a computer program executing on merge processor (104) processes the potentially viewable data sources as a hierarchy. The program first determines, using information in the subscriber-action database (112) whether the subscriber (123) was viewing another video source, such as a VCR or DVD 402. If so, the program inserts data describing the other video source 404 into the subscriber content-choice database (128), and the process ends 416.

[0052] If the subscriber (123) was not viewing an alternate source of video and was tuned to a particular channel, then the subscriber (123) was viewing the content provided by the cable operator on that channel. To determine what content was provided by the cable provider, the program executing on the merge processor (104) determines whether the cable provider was providing local programming or advertising during the period of time 406 by accessing the local-content database (106). If so, the program inserts data describing the local programming or advertising 408 into the subscriber content-choice database (128), and the process ends. If the

cable provider was not providing local programming or advertising, the program determines whether or not the provider was providing national programming or advertising 410 by accessing the national-content database (114). If so, the program inserts data describing the national programming or advertising 412 into the subscriber content-choice database (128), and the process ends 416.

[0053] If the program determines that the subscriber 123 was not viewing another video source and the provider was providing no content, the program either inserts a record in the subscriber content-choice database 128 indicating that no content was available during the specific period of time or inserts no data at all 416. For example, if TV 126 is left on after a broadcaster ends broadcasting for the rest of the day, no content is available after the broadcaster ceases broadcasting, so either a record indicating the lack of content is inserted, or no data is inserted.

[0054] It is important to note that in an embodiment of the present invention, the process illustrated in Figure 4 is repeated for each period of time that is of interest for analyzing the data. The result of the process is a plurality of records describing a subscriber's viewing patterns during a period of time. In one embodiment of the present invention, the subscriber content-choice database (128) includes data from a plurality of subscribers as well. The databases and processor (104) in such an embodiment are configured appropriately to process the anticipated volume of data.

[0055] In the embodiment shown in Figures 3A and 3B, the process is repeated for each quarter hour. In other embodiments, the time period may be divided into smaller increments, such as tenth-of-a-second increments.

[0056] Figure 3B illustrates the result of merging the data records shown in Figure 3A using the process illustrated in Figure 4. As in Figure 3A, Figure 3B is a simplistic view of this data, including the Content Type 302 and the various slices of time 304, 306, 308. In the table shown in Figure 3B, the Content Type column 302 includes only a Programming 320 and an Advertising 322 row.

[0057] As shown in Figure 3A, during the period from 1:00 until 2:30, the cable provider provides local programming and advertising 312, 314. The process of Figure 4 determined that the subscriber 123 was viewing no other video source 318, and therefore, the program inserts data into the subscriber content-choice database 128 related to local programming and advertising 320, 322. During the period beginning at 2:30 and ending at 4:15, the subscriber 123 viewed video from another source 318. Therefore, the program inserts data related to the other source for this time period. During the period from 4:15 until 5:15, the provider provided national programming and advertising with the exception of the period from 5:15 until 5:30, during which local advertising was provided. The program inserts this data into the subscriber content-choice database.

[0058] Figure 5 is a table illustrating the programming that the subscriber 123 viewed during the period shown in Figures 3A and 3B. As with Figures 3A and 3B, the table includes a Time section 502 and a Content section 504. The Time section 502 is divided into hour and quarter-hour segments.

[0059] According to Figures 3A and 3B, between 1:00 and 2:30, the subscriber 123 viewed local programming and advertising. By accessing the local-content database (106), the merge processor (104) determines that the local programming consisted of a NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) basketball game and local advertising 506.

[0060] According to Figures 3A and 3B, during the period from 2:30 until 4:15, the subscriber (123) viewed a DVD 508. The merge processor (104) determines that the DVD was a science fiction DVD by extracting data from the subscriber-action database (112).

[0061] And according to Figures 3A and 3B, between 4:15 and 5:15, the subscriber (123) viewed national content and advertising, with the exception of the period between 5:15 and 5:30 during which the cable operator inserted a local advertisement segment in the content stream in place of the national content 510. By accessing the national-content database (114), the merge processor (104) determines that the national content viewed by the subscriber (123) was an NBA (National Basketball Association) basketball game.

[0062] In an embodiment of the present invention, an analyst evaluates the data shown in Figure 5 to determine preferences and viewing habits of the subscriber (123). In one embodiment of the present invention, the analyst is a computer program executing on a processor (not shown). The analyst also attempts to extrapolate the data in order to project purchase habits of the subscriber 123. In order to evaluate the data shown in Figure 5, the analyst begins by assigning a category or genre to the programming. For example, during the period between 1:00 and 2:30, the subscriber 123 viewed a NCAA basketball game 506. An analyst would assign various types and levels of categories to the game, such as basketball, college athletics (type of program), college name, and conference. The analyst may also note that sometime between 2:15 and 2:30, a PGA golf tournament began, and the subscriber 123 started a DVD movie. This might indicate that the subscriber 123 did not enjoy watching golf on TV. During the same period, the subscriber 123 also watched several advertisements. The analyst categorizes these as well. The analyst repeats the process of categorization of programming and advertising for the remainder of the data 508, 510.

[0063] By categorizing content using multiple category types and multiple levels, the analyst is able to provide an abundance of information to programming and advertising producers, and providers, as well as to the product owners and manufacturers who pay to have the ads produced and distributed. Categorization in this manner also provides the analyst with multiple perspectives from which to analyze the data.

[0064] In addition, in an embodiment of the present invention, the analyst may look for patterns or correlations between multiple programs and advertisements or between categories of multiple programs and advertisements. In correlating data, the analyst is seeking causal, complementary, parallel, or reciprocal relations between various occurrences of data. For example, in the embodiment shown in Figure 5, the subscriber 123 viewed a basketball game, a science fiction movie, and another basketball game. An analyst may correlate this data and find that the subscriber 123 generally watches primarily sports broadcasts, and otherwise watches content from video sources in the home. The analyst may also perform a probability analysis to determine the likelihood that a subscriber 123 will watch a particular category or genre of show if presented with the opportunity.

[0065] Although only a brief period of time is shown in the Figures, the subscriber content-choice database includes data recorded continually over many days. By analyzing various days and time periods, an analyst can determine a subscribers time-of-day viewing patterns as well as the subscriber's patterns of viewing duration. For example, an analyst may determine whether the subscriber 123 tends to view the entirety of a program or of an advertisement.

[0066] Determining the duration of viewing of advertisements is important to advertisers. If a subscriber 123 initially views an entire advertisement but subsequently, views only a small portion of the advertisement, then the advertiser may need to reschedule the advertisement so

that it runs less frequently, or replace the advertisement altogether. Also, if subscribers viewing a particular category of programming generally view ads in their entirety, but other viewers do not, the advertiser may want to focus resources on presenting the advertisement to these viewers.

[0067] Beyond analyzing ads in general, advertisers may also desire information related to specific ads or even of a competitor's ads. Using the information, the advertiser may be able to determine the relative strengths and weaknesses of the advertisers own strategy versus a competitor's strategy.

[0068] In an embodiment of the present invention, various indirect methods are also used to determine the popularity of programming and the effectiveness of advertising. For example, advertising effectiveness is often measured in terms of viewer attitudes and subsequent viewer actions, such as purchases, inquiries, behavior changes, and other actions. Method of obtaining these indirect measures include: focus group tests, post-advertising surveys questioning whether an advertisement was viewed, remembered and possible impact, and measures of product purchases or other indirect results that may indicate whether or not an advertising campaign has been successful. In an embodiment of the present invention, additional databases store the data derived through these indirect methods. The merge processor 104 combines this data with the data in the subscriber content-choice database 128 to provide additional information to analysts and content providers.

[0069] Figure 6 is a flowchart illustrating the process for identifying a desirable subscriber in an embodiment of the present invention after data has been merged into the subscriber information database 132. By using the process illustrated in Figure 6, an advertiser, programmer, distributor, or other content provider identifies subscribers to target. An content

provider may carry out the process illustrated in Figure 6 manually, allow the analyzer 134 to carry out the process automatically, or may use some combination of the two.

[0070] In an automated process, the analyzer 134 determines the relevant criteria for determining which subscribers should receive a targeted advertisement 602. For example, a product may be associated with a specific demographic group. Also, past purchasers of a product may be much more likely to purchase the same product in the future than people who have never before purchased the product.

[0071] The advertiser next identifies the relevant information in the subscriber information database (132) 604. For example, if the product is associated with a demographic group, and specific content, such as a television program, is also associated with the demographic group, the analyzer 134 identifies the viewing history for a subscriber as the relevant information in the database 134. If purchases of the product relate to past purchases, the analyzer 134 identifies a purchase history in the database 132 as relevant.

[0072] The analyzer 134 extracts the relevant data from the database (132) 606. Extracting the information may include creating a report, spreadsheet, or other format, which can be used by the analyzer 134 or a content provider to examine the data to identify desirable subscribers.

[0073] In the process shown in Figure 6, the analyzer 134 next determines the probability that a subscriber will purchase Product A based on the first attribute 608 and on the second attribute 610. Figures 7A and 7B illustrate an example of how the probability calculation is performed.

[0074] Figure 7A is a table illustrating a data extract 702 from a subscriber information database 132, resulting from the extract step 606 in Figure 6. In the embodiment shown, the extract 702 includes 3 columns, viewing history 704, city of residence 706, and a flag denoting

whether or not the subscriber has purchased product A 708. The advertiser uses the data from the extract 702 to determine the probability that a subscriber with a particular viewing history 704 or city of residence 706 has purchased product A 708.

[0075] Figures 7B and 7C are tables illustrating the result of the probability calculations by viewing history and city respectively. The table 710 shown in Figure 7B includes two columns: Viewing History 712 and Probability expressed as a percentage 714. Probability 714 is the probability, based on the data in the extract 702, that a subscriber who viewed the program shown in the Viewing History column 712 will purchase Product A. For example, in the data extract 702, two out of three subscribers who watched Show 1 purchased Product A. Therefore, absent any other influences, the probability that a subscriber who views Show 1 will purchase Product A is 66.7%.

[0076] Figure 7C includes a table 720, illustrating a similar calculation for city of residence. The table 720 includes a City column 722 and a Probability column 724. Based on the data shown, the probability that a subscriber who resides in city A will purchase Product A is 66.7% based on the data extract 702 shown in Figure 7A.

[0077] Referring again to Figure 6, once the advertiser has determined the probability for each of the attributes, the advertiser determines which subscribers are to be targeted 612. Since the advertiser believes that it is best to target subscribers who have purchased Product A in the past, the advertiser targets subscribers in the following order: (1) viewers of Show 1 and/or residents of city A (tie), (2) viewers of Show 2, (3) residents of city B or C (tie), and (4) viewers of Show 3.

[0078] The example illustrated by Figures 7A-C relies on only two variables. In other embodiments of the present invention, a user relies on many additional variables to determine the most effective and efficient use of advertising budget.

[0079] An embodiment of the present invention provides great value to content providers. As a result, content providers are willing to pay for the outputs derived from the various reports and analysis. The content providers may be billed a flat subscription-type rate for access to all information received or they may pay for each report and/or analysis that they request.

[0080] An embodiment of the present invention includes a computer-readable medium, having computer-readable instructions for assigning a category and merging the subscriber action and media-content information. Another embodiment includes computer-readable instructions for correlating multiple subscriber actions occurring over a period of time, such as an online analytical processing application.

[0081] A computer-readable medium includes an electronic, optical, magnetic, or other storage or transmission device capable of providing a processor, such as the processor in a web server, with computer-readable instructions. Examples of such media include, but are not limited to, a floppy disk, CD-ROM, magnetic disk, memory chip, or any other medium from which a computer processor can read. Also, various other forms of computer-readable media may transmit or carry instructions to a computer, including a router, private or public network, or other transmission device or channel.

[0082] The foregoing description of the preferred embodiments of the invention has been presented only for the purpose of illustration and description and is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to the precise forms disclosed. Numerous modifications and adaptations

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thereof will be apparent to those skilled in the art without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention.

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